

**Tim Oliver**

## Book review: This is London: life and death in the world city. By Ben Judah

**Article (Accepted version)  
(Unrefereed)**

**Original citation:**

Oliver, Tim (2016) Book review: This is London: life and death in the world city. By Ben Judah. *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), 92 (3). pp. 737-738. ISSN 0020-5850

DOI: [10.1111/1468-2346.12627](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12627)

© 2016 The Author

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/66406/>

Available in LSE Research Online: May 2016

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

**Ben Judah, *This is London: Life and Death in the World City*. Picador, 2016.**

'London; a nation, not a city.' So wrote Benjamin Disraeli in 1870. 145 years later there can be little doubt that London is the UK's undiscovered country. Anybody following UK politics would think that the most important questions facing this European power are about Scotland, of rising English nationalism or the future of UK-EU relations. But the biggest question Britain faces is how to manage its capital city; the UK's most populous, richest and most powerful area, but one rapidly diverging from the rest of the country it dominates. The economic, political, social and security consequences for London, the UK, and Britain's place in Europe and the world are often overlooked. Ben Judah's work is therefore a welcome guide to a metropolis that many Britons, foreign diplomats and readers of this journal will have only a vague awareness of.

Judah, author of works on Putin's Russia, turns his foreign correspondent's eye to his place of birth. 'I was born in London, but I no longer recognise the city' he tells us on the first page. While he avoids passing judgement on what London has become, he cannot avoid admitting, 'I don't know if I love the new London or if it frightens me.' Today only 45 per cent of Londoners are white-British, down from 86 per cent in the 1970s. Yet the city has grown, surging from a low of 6.4 million in 1991 to where it is now on course to pass 10 million. This is the new London; a global city filled with immigrants, and it is the millions of immigrant Londoners Judah sets out to tell us about. To do so he avoids listing the numerous statistics that show London to be a place apart. Instead he offers numerous pen-portraits of the immigrant communities. To understand these Londoners he goes from visiting the rich homes of Arabs in Knightsbridge (London's 'Arab quarter') to sleeping rough a few streets away with Romanian peasants turned London beggars. Along the way he tells us of the human cost of migration. He casts a light into the lives of the likes of Poles, Somalis, Afghans, Filipinas and Ghanaians in the large areas of London many visitors never hear of such as Neasden, Beckton, and Harlesden. He tells us of immigrants views of the English and British, which are rarely complimentary: mean, ugly, lazy, cruel, secretive and snobbish; though there is respect for Britain's constitutional rights and how people are always saying sorry.

It is this global London that more than any other part of the UK shapes Britain's place in the world. London's insatiable appetite for finance means the UK is open to and involved in every global market; the high returns on investment draw in money that overheat one area of the UK economy, and often tie Britain to unsavoury individuals and regimes; the social, transport and housing needs of a global city home to a global ruling, middle and working class skews UK policies and markets; UK-EU relations can be shaped to London's needs, so much so that in 2013 Prime Minister David Cameron vetoed an EU Treaty largely to protect the financial interests of the City of London; a capital city and workforce made up of immigrants (and with an illegal immigrant population larger than the population of Edinburgh) means the UK remains open to immigration and makes it the endpoint for many of the world's migrant routes (including many of its most dangerous); the environmental, criminal, drug, extremist and terrorist problems facing the metropolis shape UK responses to each; UK views on multiculturalism, integration, race and dealing with the legacies of empire are played out in London; British views of the world and global views of Britain are channelled through a London centred media and diplomatic community. Hints of all of these come across throughout the book. While Judah offers no comparisons with other global cities, readers will recognise patterns seen around the world.

Judah's style of writing can sometimes jar. I tired of reading about empty fried chicken boxes. Judah also avoids the North American, Antipodean and European immigrants. London therefore appears divided between the likes of the poorest peasants from Eastern Europe and Arab princes and Russian oligarchs. He never ventures into the white-British or English areas that still fill and surround the city or who have returned to its inner-city along with their hipster cafes and yoga classes. The English might be leaving large areas of London, cockney might be heading for extinction, but the British sill make up a significant proportion and control large swathes of it. Westminster, Whitehall and the Court of St James may be distant to most of the migrant community, but they remain central to London and shape the way the metropolis relates to Britain and the world. These are, however, minor weaknesses. This is a book to be read by anybody moving to London or who wants to understand the darker sides of global cities.